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EASTERN EUROPEAN INTELLIGENCER

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3 Nov. 1972Belgrade Concerned About Anti-Slovene Demonstrations in Austria

A month ago, the Austrian government placed bilingual (German and Slovene) road signs in areas with large Slovene minorities. Angry German citizens, however, tore down the signs and in several emotional meetings with national and local leaders have demonstrated their continuing opposition to replacing the signs. The Yugoslav press has called the demonstrations "anti-Slovene and anti-Yugoslav" and have also raised the level of vituperation by labeling the demonstrations as Nazi inspired.

The Yugoslav government has filed "a categorical demarche" with Vienna in which Belgrade demanded the replacement of signs, the suppression of anti-Slovene organizations in Austria, and safeguarding of the full exercise of the Slovene minority's rights already stipulated in a state treaty. These demands strain Vienna's attempt to resolve the problem through negotiation and compromise.

The Yugoslav presidential council on foreign affairs met yesterday and all indications are that Belgrade is going to keep up the pressure on the issue. Acting Foreign Minister Jaksa Petric told a meeting of Slovene officials on the same day that Belgrade may have to "internationalize" the situation, presumably by taking the violations of the treaty to the UN or other international bodies. Such a move would be unfortunate because the bilingual sign issue is virtually the only problem marring relations between Austria and Yugoslavia.

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